

## UNESCO Topic 1: Preservation of Cultural Heritage Sites in Conflict Zones

One of UNESCO's goals is "to encourage the identification, protection and preservation of cultural and natural heritage around the world considered to be of outstanding value to humanity."<sup>1</sup> To accomplish this goal, UNESCO has a list of sites around the world that are UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Ranging from national parks to historical monuments, these sites are found all over the world, and are included in the list based on 10 different criteria.<sup>2</sup>

Unfortunately, until this very day, many of these sites have been, and are located in areas where there is war and/or conflict. The negative outcomes of war often include the damage or destruction of UNESCO World Heritage Sites. For example, during World War II, German bombs destroyed the Christ Church Greyfriars in London.<sup>3</sup>

More recently, ISIS militants took over Hatra, an ancient metropolis in Iraq that dates back to the Roman era that is a UNESCO Heritage site, using it as a training camp and damaging it in the process.<sup>4</sup> ISIS has destroyed other cultural sites in Iraq and Syria because its members deem the sites to be blasphemous. In addition to ISIS, smaller groups have also destroyed cultural property: in 2003, Saddam Hussein loyalists destroyed 12 million books, manuscripts, and stone tablets in the Baghdad National Library. Though not a UNESCO Heritage Site, this was a significant loss of Iraqi national culture.<sup>5</sup>

Though domestic and international conflict is often unavoidable, UNESCO has taken action against the destruction of natural and cultural sites. In 1972, UNESCO adopted *The Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage*. In terms of protection, the convention states that countries must "set up within its territories, where such services do not exist, one or more services for the protection, conservation and presentation of the cultural and natural heritage with an appropriate staff and possessing the means to discharge their functions."<sup>6</sup> (I recommend you read the entire convention. It is footnote 6.) In 2003, UNESCO passed the *The Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage*,<sup>7</sup> and *The UNESCO Declaration concerning the Intentional Destruction of Cultural heritage*.<sup>8</sup> In 2005, *The Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions* was passed.<sup>9</sup> (In addition to the 1972 convention, reading these three will help your research.)

The focus of our committee is not to resolve conflicts or end wars; rather, we are concerned with the destruction of cultural property that often goes along with conflict and war.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://whc.unesco.org/en/about/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://whc.unesco.org/en/criteria/>

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.waymarking.com/waymarks/WMTC3E\\_Christ\\_Church\\_Greyfriars\\_City\\_of\\_London\\_UK](http://www.waymarking.com/waymarks/WMTC3E_Christ_Church_Greyfriars_City_of_London_UK)

<sup>4</sup> <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/2015/03/150312-isis-destruction-looting-ancient-sites-iraq-syria-archaeology/>

<sup>5</sup> <http://listverse.com/2014/03/13/10-historical-and-cultural-sites-destroyed-by-war/>

<sup>6</sup> <http://whc.unesco.org/en/conventiontext/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://ich.unesco.org/en/convention>

<sup>8</sup> [http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=17718&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=17718&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html)

<sup>9</sup> [http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=31038&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=31038&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html)

- Outside of UNESCO Heritage Sites, what constitutes cultural property? How can we redefine cultural property so that certain sites are prioritized?
- Can we punish individuals and/or groups who damage or destroy cultural property?
- How can UNESCO and individual countries monitor Heritage Sites and cultural property to see if and how they are being damaged?
- Does your country contain Heritage Sites that are possibly subject to being damaged by conflict, or has it happened to your country in the past?
- How can existing conventions be improved to ensure protection of Heritage Sites? How does your country view cultural heritage?
- How/why is the protection of cultural property important?

Your research and position papers should not be limited to just these questions; I encourage you to use these questions as guidance, not as a strict outline. I reiterate that when you write your position papers, you are writing about the position of the nation you are representing. If you have any questions, please reach out to me via email at [fpaley@mail.yu.edu](mailto:fpaley@mail.yu.edu). I look forward to reading your papers.

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